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DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY · UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS · URBANA, ILL.

INTERCULTURAL ATTITUDES AFTER READING AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ESSAY: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

VASSO VASSILIOU
ATHENIAN INSTITUTE OF ANTHROPOS
ATHENS, GREECE

HARRY C. TRIANDIS
AND
GERALD ONKEN
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
URBANA, ILLINOIS

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Communication, Cooperation, and Negotiation in Culturally Heterogeneous Groups
Project Supported by the Advanced Research Projects Agency, ARPA Order No. 454
Under Office of Naval Research Contract NR 177-472, Nonr 1834(36)

FRED E. FIEDLER AND HARRY C. TRIANDIS
Principal Investigators

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GROUP EFFECTIVENESS RESEARCH LABORATORY
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
URBANA, ILLINOIS

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Vasso Vassiliou
Athenian Institute of Anthropos
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Isso Vassiliou
Athenian Institute of Anthropos
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Harry C. Triandis and Gerald Oncken
University of Illinois
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ABSTRACT

A modified Solomon design was used to test the intercultural attitudes of 62 Americans living in Greece, after they were exposed to an ethnographic essay about Greek culture. A variety of measures was employed in both the pretests and the post-tests. The data suggested that much learning did occur, but there was no evidence of improvement in intercultural attitudes. It appears that intercultural perception becomes more accurate, but intercultural affect is unchanged.

Intercultural Attitudes after Reading an Ethnographic Essay:

An Exploratory Study¹

**Vasso Vassiliou
Athenian Institute of Anthropos
Athens, Greece**

**Harry C. Triandis and Gerald Oncken
University of Illinois
Urbana, Illinois**

An analysis of interpersonal attitudes by Triandis (1967) showed that these can profitably be conceived as consisting of three broad components: a cognitive, an affective and a behavioral. Specifically, a person associates certain ideas or concepts with another person, i.e., he stereotypes, he feels good or bad about the other person, i.e., he evaluates him, and he intends to behave in a variety of ways towards him, i.e., he has behavioral intentions of certain kinds.

Similarly in training a person for effective interaction in another culture, Triandis (1968) has described three kinds of training: cognitive, i.e., area training, affective, i.e., information designed to make the trainee "feel good" about the target culture, and behavioral, i.e., information, and experiences which will improve the trainee's interaction skills.

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Studies by Spector (1968) have shown that affective training improves intercultural attitudes, and Wedge (1968) has argued that behavioral training is exceptionally desirable as a preparation for an American going abroad. However, Triandis (1968) has argued that some combination of these various forms of training is desirable, the combination depending upon the nature of the task to be performed by the American and the relative influences or effects of such training.

In order to understand the processes involved in training a person for effective interaction in another culture it is desirable to learn something about the consequences of each of these types of training. The present report examines the effect of cognitive training on intercultural attitudes. Specifically, it examines the effects of reading an ethnographic essay upon the stereotypes and general information acquired by an American.

Method

Subjects: All subjects were Americans working in Athens, Greece, taking psychology courses. Since they were living in Greece they were, presumably, motivated to learn something more about Greek culture. To increase this motivation, the training materials were presented to them as course assignments.

Experimental Design: A modified Solomon design, with five groups was employed. Sixty-two subjects were distributed randomly among the following groups:

- I. Post-test only; N of 13.
- II. Pretest and post-test; N of 12
- III. Essay and post-test; N of 15
- IV. Pretest, essay and post-test; N of 14
- V. Pretest, essay, post-test with open book (i.e., essay was available to the subjects during the post-test.) The N of this group was 8.

Pre- and Post-test Measures: The subjects were asked to guess how representative samples of Americans would assign 20 traits to (a) themselves, and (b) the Greeks; furthermore, they were asked to guess how representative samples of Greeks would assign these 20 traits to (a) themselves and (b) the Americans. The 20 traits were derived from extensive previous work on stereotyping, first through open-ended interviews (Triandis, 1967) and later through structured questionnaires (Triandis and Vassiliou, 1967a) and finally through a modified interview with representative samples of Americans and Greeks living in Greece (Vassiliou, Triandis, Vassiliou and McGuire, 1968). The subjects were also asked to guess how representative samples of Americans and Greeks answered 20 ideology and 20 personality items previously employed by Triandis and Vassiliou (1967b). In addition, they were asked to guess the way representative samples of Americans and Greeks responded to 5 concepts on the antecedent-consequent meaning questionnaire (Triandis, Kilty, Shanmugam, Tanaka and Vassiliou, 1968), and to 11 concepts on 4 semantic differential scales. Data on American and Greek responses to these scales were made available by Vassiliou from Osgood's Atlas. In addition, they

guessed on how representative samples of Americans and Greeks would respond to 7 roles on 11 role differential scales, taken from the work of Triandis, Vassiliou and Nassiakou (1968). Since the above mentioned studies included results on the actual ways Americans and Greeks responded to these instruments, it was possible to derive an accuracy score, on each instrument, and to determine if cultural training improved this score.

The Experimental Treatment: This consisted of an essay by Triandis and Vassiliou (1967b). This 60-page long essay was based on the results of comparative analyses of the subjective culture of Americans and Greeks, reported in several publications of Triandis and Vassiliou. The data were derived from studies of representative samples of Greeks and comparisons with American data. All the information required for the correct answering of the pre- and post-tests was presented in the essay.

Results

Analyses of variance showed that the experimental treatment produced significant learning effects, at beyond the .01 level, on 1 out of 20 (5%) of the ideology, 1 out of 20 (5%) of the personality, 5 out of 44 (11.4%) of the semantic differential, and 4 out of 70 (5.7%) of the role differential judgments. Only the open book experimental group (V) learned significant amounts of information relevant to the antecedent-consequent method.

These results, however, have to be evaluated in the light of the percentages of the correct responses made by the pretest groups.

Clearly, if the pre-test groups make mostly correct responses, it is impossible to improve the performance of the subjects on the posttest. In order to obtain an impression of these results, in terms of "possible improvement", we judged the relative accuracy of the pretest groups on the various instruments. Table 1 summarizes these results.

Of the 20 ideology items, the average responses of the pre-test groups were correct on 8 items and wrong on 12. The judgment as to whether they were correct or wrong was made by examining these means and seeing whether they were closer to the "true" American or to the "true" Greek means, as determined from surveys of representative samples of Americans and Greeks. The essay groups showed correct shifts, at the .01 level, on one out of these 12 wrong items, hence 8% of the time. A similar analysis was performed on the 20 personality items. Here 9 items were judged incorrectly by the pretest groups and after reading the essay they improved significantly on one, thus showing an 11% improvement in guessing.

Turning now to the semantic differentials, we judged the correctness of the pretest responses on the basis of the following criteria: if (a) they guessed on the same side as the true Greek ratings, or (b) if their guess or the true rating were at the neutral point and "true" and "guess" judgments did not differ by more than 2 semantic differential scale units. On the basis of these criteria, 39 of the 44 semantic differential judgments of the pretest groups were correct. The essay groups showed

Table 1
Cognitive Learning as Reflected in Different Kinds of Measures

Type of Measure	Total No. of Items	Items Incorrect at Pretest	No. of Items Showing Significant Improve/t	Percent Improve/t
Ideology Items	20	12	1	8.3
Personality Items	20	9	1	11.1
Semantic Differential Judgments	44	5	1	20.0
Role Differential Judgments	70	15	2	13.3
Antecedent-Judgments (guessing American responses)	5	0	--	--
Consequent Judgments (guessing Americans)	5	4	1	25.0
	5	4	4	100.0*
Antecedent Judgments (guessing Greeks)	5	4	3	75.0
	5	4	4	100.0*
Consequent Judgments (guessing Greeks)	5	4	1	25.0**
	5	4	3	75.0***
	5	4	4	100.0*
Stereotypes				
Americans see Americans	20	6	1	16.7
Americans: see Greeks	20	1	0	0
Greeks see Greeks	20	13	3	23.0
Greeks see Americans	20	12	4	33.3

* Results for open book group only (Group V).

** Results for essay-post group only.

*** Results for pretest-essay-posttest group only.

improvements on 4 of these basically correct judgments, i.e., they approached the true Greek mean even more than they had done in the pretests. In addition, the essay groups corrected one of their erroneous guesses, so that they changed their judgment to the other side of the neutral point. The result is that the essay groups were correct on 40 out of 44 judgments, or 91% of the time. The improvement was 1 in 5 items, or 20% of the time.

On the role differential judgments, the pretest groups guessed correctly 55 out of 70 (78.6%) times, and the essay groups 57 out of 70 (81.5%) the improvement occurring on 2 out of the possible 15 items (13.3%). The two corrections were rather dramatic, involving a complete shift of point of view, and clearly relevant to points made in the essay. In addition, the essay groups improved their guesses, significantly at the .01 level, in the correct direction in two cases, thus showing significant changes on 4 items.

On antecedent and consequent method results, the pretest subjects guessed the American responses correctly for all 5 antecedents, but guessed only one of the five consequents correctly. The post-test results showed that the two essay groups had improved their guesses on one of the wrong consequents; group V (the open book group) also improved its guesses on two additional consequents, thus giving results which were correct for 4 out of 5 consequents. The group that did not see the essay did not show the improvements found in the essay groups. Thus, there was almost complete learning of the information provided in the essay concerning the antecedents and consequents of five concepts as seen by Americans.

On the antecedents of the five concepts, the pretest subjects guessed the Greek responses incorrectly on 4 out of 5 items. The essay groups improved their performance, so that the open book group guessed correctly all five consequents. The pretest, essay, posttest group was correct on 4 out of 5, but the essay, posttest group was correct on only 2 out of 5, suggesting that the pretest helped the subjects, to sensitize them to what they should look for in the essay.

In sum, the subjects seem to have learned almost as much as was possible, as reflected in their antecedent-consequent judgments. This is material that apparently can be communicated to subjects.

We turn now to the study of stereotypes. The pretest subjects had the correct perceptions of the way Americans see themselves on 70% of the traits. The subjects who read the essay improved their performance to 75%. The pretest subjects were correct in guessing the way Americans perceive Greeks on 95% of the traits, there was no evidence of improvement with the reading of the essay, presumably because there was so little room for improvement.

The pretest subjects guessed the way Greeks perceive Greeks correctly 35% of the time; after reading the essay they were correct 50% of the time. Finally, the pretest subjects guessed correctly the way Greeks perceive Americans on eight of the traits, but after reading the essay they were correct on twelve of the traits.

Thus, there is evidence that Americans exposed to the essay learned a fair amount about Greek stereotyping.

It is also possible to examine more analytically the subjects' changes in their guesses of the way Americans perceive Greeks, as a result of reading the essay. The subjects thought that Americans see Greeks as more witty, egotistic, and obliging, and less trusting and cooperative, after they read the essay than they did before reading it. Thus, on three out of 5 traits on which there is a significant shift the change in the American perceptions of Greeks is unfavorable. It seems reasonable to expect that subjects whose attitude towards Greeks improved after reading the essay would express such attitudes by projecting more positive perceptions of Greeks on other Americans. There was no evidence of this happening, if anything, the opposite effect was observed. Thus, it appears that the subjects learned much about Greeks, but they did not change their affect towards them.

Discussion

There is a good deal of evidence that the subjects learned much from reading the essay. The pretest results suggest that the antecedent-consequent judgments were the most difficult to guess correctly, and it is for this type of measurement that we obtained the most dramatic learning effects. On the other hand, the semantic differential judgments appear to have been easy, since the pretest groups guessed the way Greeks make such judgments correctly 88.6% of the time. The other kinds of measures were intermediate in difficulty. Small amounts of learning were observed when the Ss guessed the way Americans judged the items.

As might be expected, the most extensive cognitive learning occurred in the most clearly cognitive of the items (from the antecedent-consequent method) suggesting that perhaps there is an isomorphism between the kind of learning and the type of attitude change. It seems likely that cognitive learning changes mostly the cognitive component of intercultural attitudes, affective learning the affective component and behavioral learning the behavioral intentions of subjects. This point has not been adequately tested in the present exploratory study, but the data are consistent with this interpretation.

It is also consistent with common sense expectations that the subjects would change least when they perceive the cognitions of other Americans. Little change does occur because there is little room for it to occur and also perhaps because the subjects feel themselves to be experts on Americans, while they are willing to learn about Greeks.

From a methodological point of view the present study suggests that the antecedent-consequent method is promising for the measurement of intercultural perceptions, although all of the methods employed in this study can be used in similar studies.

The total evidence of the present study suggests that interpersonal attitudes do not improve after reading an ethnographic essay, but intercultural perception becomes more accurate.

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